

No 7: Autism and anxiety

Anxiety is perfectly normal. Everyone feels anxious at times. Children and young people with autism struggle to predict what will happen. To think about the best way to support them it is helpful to replace anxious with uncertain.



Here are some helpful tips:

- **Make life as predictable as possible and use visual supports, like:**
 - Calendars
 - Post its
 - White boards
 - Text messages
 - Prompts on phones or devices.
- **Make time each day to support the children and young people to do things they like, enjoy their special interest, for example:** come home, have a snack and then special interest time or in school build this into their day.
- **Ensure each day fills the 'feel good wells', as advised by Tony Attwood in *Exploring Depression and Beating the Blues*:**
 - Art and Pleasure
 - Thinking and learning
 - Relaxation
 - Physical exercise
 - Social time
 - Self awareness.
- **Keep a happiness diary:** when things are going well take a photo of the moment and when it comes to the experience again remind them they were happy by showing the photo.

Autism and anxiety, continued

Don't apply your emotions to the child or young person's emotions, our idea of happy or sad may not be the same as the child or young person with autism

Keep minds busy, try not to spiral into negativity. If you feel you're on a semantic roundabout I.E. going round and round about the same thing, end the conversation and find something to do e.g. Lego, cooking, board games, Minecraft

Limit screen time, have wifi timers

Don't feel you always have to be doing sometimes it's okay to just have me time, or time away from the busy social world.

Keep a compliments diary

Use techniques from the Zones of Regulation or the Incredible Five Point Scale so that you teach perspective

Teach about the Stress Bucket and make sure that the child or young person can know their limits and not overfill their buckets

Make time for relaxation: Children and Young People with Autism find the social world exhausting, they need recovery time make sure there are relaxation or shut down times built into the week

Support the child or young person to embrace their uniqueness

Accept difference and autism and most of all enjoy the quirky.

